

Asthma & Exercise

Having asthma doesn't mean you can't be active. Some people who have asthma will have symptoms, like coughing and wheezing, when they are active. Other people have asthma that is triggered only by exercise (exercise-induced asthma). In both cases, symptoms of asthma can almost always be prevented. Some people avoid the symptoms by keeping their asthma under control with their regular long-term control asthma medications. For other people, taking quick-relief asthma medicine before they exercise helps them avoid symptoms. You and your doctor or asthma counselor can create a written Asthma Action/Management Plan that includes ways to control asthma triggered by exercise so you can stay active.

Exercise-Induced Asthma (EIA)

When asthma is triggered only by physical activity, it is called exercise-induced asthma (EIA). Just as with other asthma triggers, a person who is triggered into an asthma attack by exercise has airways that narrow and tighten after they begin to exercise. In addition, the symptoms of EIA can be much worse with seasonal allergies. Fast, hard breathing, wheezing and a tight chest are signs of an asthma attack. People with EIA may also have extra mucus in their lungs that is produced during an attack which makes them cough. The symptoms may begin as soon as 5 minutes after starting to exercise, and may last for 30 minutes. An asthma

attack can be very serious and scary. If a person with EIA does not get treatment, they will often limit their participation in physical activities.



Asthma/Action Management Plan

Make sure you discuss with your doctor or asthma counselor what to do before, during and after exercise to keep from having an asthma episode. Then follow the Asthma/Action Management Plan prescribed by your doctor. The following steps can help you and your doctor make a plan that works for you.

Keep an activity diary where you write down your activities and the asthma symptoms you have during these activities. It is also a good idea to write down the steps you took to get relief so your doctor will be able to see how the treatment plan is (or is not) working.

Dealing with Asthma and Exercise

Experts think it's important for people with asthma to get regular exercise to condition and strengthen their lungs. Try these tips to help you cope:

- Follow your doctor's instructions about using medication before or after exercise.
- The type of exercise you choose is important because people with asthma tolerate some sports better than others.
- Avoid triggers that may cause or worsen your asthma. (for example, avoid exercise if symptoms are present; don't exercise outdoors when pollen counts are high).
- Start with a 15-minute warm-up to allow the lungs to adjust to the increased demand for oxygen.
- End with a 15-minute cool-down rather than stopping abruptly.
- In cold weather, cover your mouth and nose with a scarf to help warm the air before it gets to the lungs. Breathe through your nose, if possible, to warm the air.
- If you're on a team, give your coach a copy of your written Asthma Action Plan.

When you take your medication can be very important.

Ask your doctor about the best times to take each of your medications in relation to your exercise schedule.

When you are actively working out, pay attention to the type of exercises that feel best to you, and the amount of time you can do them without asthma symptoms.

For example, can you get through a complete workout cycle without any symptoms? How far can you walk comfortably? By talking openly and honestly with your doctor about any symptoms you may have during exercise, he or she may be able to adjust the type or dosage of asthma medication to help you exercise without getting breathing problems. He or she may also be able to help you find new or different ways to be active.

Here are some medicines that your doctor might prescribe for asthma symptoms with exercise:

Short-acting inhaled beta₂-agonist "quick-relief medicines" such as Albuterol

TO PREVENT SYMPTOMS:

Use about 30 minutes before exercising

TO STOP SYMPTOMS:

Use at earliest sign of asthma symptoms

Cromolyn sodium (Intal), nedocromil sodium (Tilade)

TO PREVENT SYMPTOMS:

Use about 30 minutes before exercising

Long-acting beta₂-agonist such as salmeterol (Serevent) or formoterol fumarate (Foradil)

TO PREVENT SYMPTOMS:

Use at least 30 minutes before exercising

Regular use of a long-term controller medicine allows many people with asthma to have fewer symptoms with exercise.

If you have symptoms, use a quick-relief medicine right away. Don't push yourself, stop and rest if you need to. **Remember, long-term controller medicines like cromolyn, salmeterol and corticosteroids are not recommended during an asthma attack because they do not immediately open the airways.**

Be sure to talk about your asthma with your family and friends. The more they know about it, the more they can help you make your Asthma Management Plan work.

Adapted from NIH and AstraZeneca materials